

VZCZCXRO9479
PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0008/01 0151409
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 151409Z JAN 10
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1245
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1337

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CHIANG MAI 000008

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: ROUND-UP: PAD CANCELS RALLY; RED-SHIRTS SPLINTERING?

REF: A. 09 CHIANG MAI 173 (DIALOGUE EXPANDS) AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)B. 09 BANGKOK 3015 (ABHISIT CANCELS)
[1](#)C. 09 CHIANG MAI 93 (U.S. ACADEMIC)

CHIANG MAI 00000008 001.2 OF 003

Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (SBU) On January 9, the generally pro-government Peoples' Alliance for Democracy cancelled a rally it planned to hold in Chiang Mai on January 16 in order to avoid violent clashes with anti-government red-shirts. Meanwhile, the localized reconciliation effort brokered by academics and private sector representatives involving one of the Chiang Mai red-shirt factions began yielding results, even as local red-shirt leaders took steps to present a more united front in the face of obvious internal divisions.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Comment: For the second time in less than two months, local red-shirt groups have prevented their opponents from gathering in Chiang Mai. Their violent rhetoric with intent to rally thousands first led to the cancellation of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's planned November 29, 2009 visit to Chiang Mai (Ref B). Now, in order to avert violence with them, the local Peoples' Alliance for Democracy (PAD) had to cancel a key political gathering. We will stay alert for signs that these two outcomes are having an impact on the local reconciliation talks, which may not be sustainable over the long-term if the cards continue to fall the red-shirts' way.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment Cont.: On the other hand, increasingly violent rhetoric on the part of the red-shirts may be a sign of weakness. If they were able to draw large numbers to rallies, they might not have to rely on a war of words designed to incite violence. Similarly, although the cancellation of Abhisit's visit and the PAD concert handed short-term victory to the red-shirts, the fact that dialogue between some local red-shirts, yellow-shirts, civil society and the Provincial authorities succeeded in averting violence this time is a very positive sign. End Summary and Comment.

14. (U) On January 9, representatives of the PAD announced the cancellation of their planned January 16 "political concert," which had been scheduled to take place at Chiang Mai's main sports stadium. Local PAD leaders cited several reasons for the decision: concerns over the safety of the audience given concurrent red-shirt activity at the same venue (several red-shirt groups will participate in the fireworks festival, which will take place at the same time); a desire to prevent their event "falling victim to those who want to use it to foment violence"; and concerns the police will be unable to provide adequate security due to visits by several members of the Royal Family scheduled at the same time.

15. (SBU) Privately, PAD contacts told us they were concerned about the economic impact on Chiang Mai had violence erupted during the concert. (We note that January is the height of the tourist season in Chiang Mai.) A red-shirt leader told us on January 7 that violence would be unavoidable were the PAD concert to go ahead as scheduled.

16. (SBU) Meanwhile, a red-shirt rally on December 29-30 at the same stadium went ahead as planned with approximately 2,000 participants. This time, the atmosphere was more festive and less overtly political, with entertainment seemingly taking precedence over content. The rally was peaceful, with only a handful of Bangkok-based speakers in attendance. The only minor

CHIANG MAI 00000008 002.2 OF 003

inconvenience resulted when participants created a traffic jam on their way to the event, which made sections of a key road used to access some main local attractions impassable, angering some tourists.

Red-Shirts Splintering?

17. (U) In the meantime, just as Prime Minister Abhisit cancelled his November 29 visit to Chiang Mai (Ref B), two competing red-shirt groups announced their formation, with both using the popular Three Kings Monument as their pulpit. On November 28, Peerapol Morakot launched the Chiang Mai Red Coordinating Center (AKA Democratic Red). In his speech, he expressed strong opposition to the current governing coalition, calling PM Abhisit a "puppet of dictators and aristocrats," while noting that his group would only express its views peacefully.

18. (SBU) A red-shirt leader with connections to this group told us its network currently spans over half of Chiang Mai's districts. He stated that most of its members view the three core red-shirt leaders Veera Musikapong, Jatuporn Prompan and Nattawut Saikua as focused on short-term tactics, but lacking a long-term strategy for change. Among the 150-200 in attendance that day was the leader of the Chiang Mai branch of the "Thaksin Lovers" group, who earlier participated in the reconciliation dialogue, but withdrew in the face of threats by

Rak Chiang Mai 51 (RCM51 -- the red-shirt group with the most violent tendencies).

¶9. (SBU) The following day, approximately 50 supporters (RCM51 leader Phetcharawat Wattanapongsirikul among them) attended the rally launching the Lanna Red Council, which purports to represent all red-shirt groups in Thailand's eight upper north provinces. Charut Pratwirakul was named as its head, and the Council laid down five key principles that would guide its work: safeguard the nation, religious institutions and the Monarchy; strive for a democracy free of intervention; fight injustice; protect "good citizens" who make "remarkable contributions" to the country; and defend good governance. According to military and police contacts, the Council enjoys the backing of key opposition Phuea Thai (PT) MPs, including Sanguan Pongmanee from Lamphun Province, Boonsong Teriyapirom from Chiang Mai, and former PM (and Thaksin brother-in-law) Somchai Wongsawat.

¶10. (SBU) Military contacts and a red-shirt leader affiliated with the Red Coordinating Center told us the Lanna Red Council was formed to try to bridge the gap between northern red-shirt groups, which they contend are repudiating violence in greater numbers. Splits like this within the red-shirt movement could weaken the PT support base in the north, our contacts opined, leading key PT MPs to support the Council in an attempt to present a united front. Separately, an RCM51 representative visited an ailing member of the Chiang Mai Red Coordinating Center in the hospital, encouraging him to return to RCM51 in an effort to unite all northern red-shirt groups under one umbrella. (Note: RCM51 is not involved in the Chiang Mai Red Coordinating Center (CRCC). The ill CRCC leader used to belong to RCM51.)

Dialogue Yields Results

¶11. (SBU) Meanwhile, the Coalition for a Peaceful and Livable Chiang Mai has met twice since Abhisit's aborted November 2009 visit to Chiang Mai. New faces were present at the December meeting, including local media, representatives of the Government Workers' Association, and Chiang Mai War Veterans. Participants exchanged views on prospects for avoiding political violence in 2010 in Chiang Mai, which pundits expect will be an active year for red-shirt protestsnation-wide. They also set

CHIANG MAI 00000008 003.2 OF 003

about planning the coalition's activities for 2010.

¶12. (SBU) Members agreed to involve religious leaders and academics to a greater degree in the group's work, taking advantage of their ability to mediate and lay down ground rules for political expression/conflict resolution. They also discussed the idea of a year-long campaign on "Building a Mindful Democracy". Attendees were tasked with bringing specific proposals to the table by February for the group to consider, with the key aim of involving all sectors of society as the dialogue moves forward. Toward the end of the meeting, PAD representatives raised concerns over lax law enforcement, which they argue allows red-shirts to intimidate the PAD and prevent it from holding gatherings. (Note: This meeting took place before PAD's decision to cancel its January 16 concert.)

¶13. (SBU) At a January 7 meeting between provincial authorities and several members of the coalition, PAD representatives agreed to consult with their leadership in Bangkok about the possibility of cancelling their January 16 concert in an effort to avoid violent clashes with red-shirt groups participating in the fireworks festival. Both events were slated to take place at the same venue.

¶14. (SBU) Despite the eventual cancellation of the concert, PAD leaders continue to insist on respect for their right to peaceful freedom of assembly. Provincial authorities gave PAD a face-saving means of cancelling its concert by agreeing to negotiate with the Sports Authority on PAD's behalf to have PAD's (generally non-refundable) deposit on the stadium returned. Provincial authorities also announced plans to hold a cross-cultural and inter-religious reconciliation-oriented event on January 23. We will request information on this event from the Provincial Government at the earliest opportunity.

¶15. (SBU) For its part, the Consulate collaborated with PA Bangkok to stage a DVC with Dr. Robert Albritton from the University of Mississippi to share some lessons from the U.S. experience with participants in the reconciliation process. 30 politicians, NGOs and civil society activists joined the event. Dr. Albritton focused on the need for all parties to respect election results, and to work for change without disrespecting the rule of law. This program built on Dr. Larry Berman's very successful presentation last year on the role of opposition parties and non-party political actors in a democracy (Ref C), and is the latest in a string of Consulate efforts to foster understanding and more open communication between political groups in northern Thailand. Members of both red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups attended, as did local government officials, representatives of Muslim organizations and the media. The discussion was very lively, covering topics such as government accountability, minority rights, public opinion, and sustainable decentralization.

¶16. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.
BARRASSO